

EGLI RIDGE GUZZLER

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT OR-025-03-070

Bureau of Land Management
Burns District Office
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Hines, Oregon 97738

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: Purpose of and Need for Action

The Burns District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to install a guzzler in the Three Rivers Resource Area. Egli Ridge is the area that will be covered by this Environmental Assessment (EA). Egli Ridge is located approximately 40 miles southwest of Burns, Oregon, in the East Wagonire Allotment. The legal description of the area to be covered by this EA is

T. 26 S., R. 25 E., Section 6, SE¼.

A. Purpose and Need

Egli Ridge lies within the East Wagonire Allotment, approximately 6 miles east of Wagonire Mountain, in an area of good forage but very limited water. The area lacks water from July through October in most years. Elk herds in the vicinity have been expanding their range and increasing in size. Current big game distribution in the East Wagonire Allotment is primarily concentrated around areas with reliable water. Egli Ridge is already getting big game (deer, antelope, and elk) use, but use of the area is limited to times when water is available. When water becomes deficient on Egli Ridge most of the wildlife using the area migrate to Wagonire Mountain, which is mainly private land. The proposal is to install a guzzler to supply wildlife with a reliable year-round water source. This would improve wildlife habitat and distribution on the East Wagonire Allotment.

B. Conformance with Applicable Land Use Plans

This EA is in compliance with management direction established in the Record of Decision for the Three Rivers Resource Management Plan/Final Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/FEIS) (Chapter 2, Wildlife Habitat, September 1992). The EA is also in compliance with State, tribal, and local laws, regulations, and land use plans.

CHAPTER II: ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

A. Description of the Proposed Action

Construct a guzzler complex consisting of two 10-foot by 30-foot water collection aprons, two brown 1,800-gallon tanks with the drinkers attached, and pipe connecting the aprons and the tanks. The guzzler complex would then be fenced to prevent livestock use. The total project area is approximately one-half acre in size.

The two 10-foot by 30-foot water collection aprons are composed of metal roofing supported by metal fenceposts. These aprons would displace the vegetation. The 1,800-gallon tanks would be partially buried (up to 24 inches) in the ground. The cattle exclusion fence around the guzzler would be a Burns District standard 4-strand barbed wire fence (see attachment.) The Burns District standard 4-strand fence has a smooth bottom wire 16 inches off the ground to allow wildlife easy access underneath it, the next three wires are barbed and placed at 22 inches, 30 inches, and 42 inches above the ground, respectively. The fenceposts would be green and have 22-foot spacing with two stays evenly placed between posts. Overall surface disturbance would be minimal, as heavy equipment would be used only to bury the tanks and plumbing. The risk of noxious weed expansion would be minimized by ensuring equipment is clean prior to entry into the site, minimizing ground disturbance, and follow-up inspections to ensure no new noxious weed establishment. The site would be accessed by approximately 100 yards of cross-country travel from the two-track (see maps). The BLM's Operations crew and Wildlife Biologist would be responsible for installation of the guzzler complex.

B. No Action Alternative

Under this alternative the guzzler complex would not be installed.

CHAPTER III: DESCRIPTION OF THE AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed in the Three Rivers RMP/EIS, and are either not known to be present or affected by the proposed action or alternative: Prime or Unique Farmlands, Floodplains, Hazardous Materials, Special Management Areas (Research Natural Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas), Water Quality, Air Quality, American Indian Religious Concerns, Paleontology, Special Status Flora, and Special Status Fauna.

The following critical elements are not analyzed in the Three Rivers RMP/EIS, but either are not known to be present or affected: Environmental Justice and Adverse Energy Impacts.

The following noncritical elements are present and affected, and will be analyzed in this document: wildlife, vegetation, livestock management, recreation, and visual resources.

This section describes site-specific affected environmental components not adequately described in the Three Rivers RMP/FEIS. The discussion is divided into critical and noncritical elements.

A. Critical Elements

1. Cultural Heritage

Cultural surveys have been completed and one site was recorded near the proposed project area. The site is a 1-acre lithic scatter consisting of flaked stone tools.

2. Migratory Birds

Migratory birds are known to use the project area for nesting, foraging, and resting as they pass through on their yearly migrations.

3. Noxious Weeds

There are currently no known infestations of noxious weeds in the vicinity of the proposed project area. However, there are known populations of noxious weeds occurring in the general area.

B. Noncritical Elements

1. Wildlife

The proposed project area lies within antelope, deer, and elk summer range. However, the lack of water limits use of the area in summer. During mild winters, the project area provides good winter range habitat for these species. Ninety-one AUMs are allocated to big game in the East Wagontire Allotment. The proposed project area also provides habitat for coyotes, badgers, a number of small mammals, and a few raptors.

2. Vegetation

The vegetation around the project area is characterized by a native mix of sagebrush species and bunch grasses with some juniper encroachment taking place.

3. Livestock Management

Current grazing practices in the Egli Ridge Pasture are managed under a graze/deferred rotation. The pasture is grazed May and June one year and deferred until after June 30 the next. The grazing levels around the proposed guzzler site are generally light due to the lack of water.

4. Recreation

The primary recreation activities in the project area are associated with hunting big game species.

5. Visual Resources

The project area is remote and not visible from any highway or main road. The project area falls entirely within the Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class III. The allowed level of change to the characteristic landscape within this VRM class is moderate. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape.

CHAPTER IV: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Proposed Action: Critical Elements

1. Cultural Heritage

There would be no known impacts to cultural heritage. The one cultural site recorded near the proposed project area would be totally avoided.

2. Migratory Birds

The proposed action would improve the habitat for all the migratory birds that use this area. First, it would provide a water resource for the birds. In addition, it is expected to increase the abundance and distribution of many of the species on which these birds prey including: invertebrates, small mammals, and other small birds. Direct impacts to migratory birds occurring from installation of the guzzler would be minimized by installing it in the fall, thereby avoiding nesting and fledging season.

3. Noxious Weeds

There is the possibility that noxious weed seeds could be transported to the site via wildlife or equipment used to construct the guzzler. These concerns would be addressed with the noxious weed prescriptions as part of the proposed action.

B. Proposed Action: Noncritical Elements

1. Wildlife

The proposed action would benefit the big game in the area by giving them a reliable year-round water source. This would allow these species to take advantage of the area's abundant forage during the dry summer and fall months. Small mammals and songbirds would also benefit from the water provided by the guzzler. Raptors and other predatory animals are likely to benefit indirectly through larger and more dependable prey populations.

2. Vegetation

The proposed action would have some minor impacts on vegetation. Approximately 1,000 square feet of vegetation would be displaced by the guzzler complex. The vegetation is also likely to have an increase in grazing use from native herbivores. However, this increased use would not negatively impact native plant communities.

3. Livestock Management

There would only be minor impacts to livestock management. Under the proposed action about one-half acre of the pasture would be excluded from cattle. It is likely that there would be some competition for forage between cattle and wildlife with the anticipated increase in big game use. However, to reduce the possibility of competition the guzzler complex would be located in an area of the pasture that receives little cattle grazing due to the area's distance from water.

4. Recreation

Under the proposed action, recreational opportunities are likely to increase in the area. Due to the availability of water big game as well as an array of wildlife species would increase use in the Egli Ridge area. Overall, big game hunting opportunities should improve with the increase of habitat use on public land.

5. Visual Resources

The proposed action meets the objectives of this VRM class. The guzzler complex would not be visible from any highway or major road.

C. No Action Alternative: Critical Elements

1. Cultural Heritage

There would be no known impacts to cultural resources.

2. Migratory Birds

There would be no new impacts on migratory birds. Water would continue to be deficient in this area most of the year.

3. Noxious Weeds

There would be no known impacts on noxious weeds.

D. No Action Alternative: Noncritical Elements

1. Wildlife

Water would continue to be a limiting habitat component for this area much of the year. Big game use of the Egli Ridge area would continue to be sparse. Big game distribution would continue to be concentrated on private land and those few areas of public land with reliable water sources.

2. Vegetation

There would be no impacts on vegetation.

3. Livestock Management

There would be no impacts to livestock management.

4. Recreation

Most recreation activities would be unaffected. However, hunting and wildlife photography would be limited due to the continuation of restricted habitat for game species.

5. Visual Resources

There would be no changes to visual resources.

E. Cumulative Effects

There would be no known cumulative effects as a result of implementing either alternative.

CHAPTER V: PERSONS AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Hunter Association
Jack Peila
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

CHAPTER VI: PARTICIPATING STAFF

Bill Andersen, Rangeland Management Specialist
Jim Buchanan, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist
Gary Foulkes, District Planning/Environmental Coordinator
Terri Giesler, Geologist
Fred McDonald, Natural Resource Specialist-Recreation
Nick Miller, Wildlife Biologist - Lead Preparer
Glen Patterson, Natural Resource Specialist-Advisor
Skip Renschler, Realty Specialist
Jon Reponen, Forestry Specialist
Lesley Richman, Weed Specialist
Jeff Rose, Fire Ecologist
Joan Suther, Field Manager
Fred Taylor, Wildlife Biologist
Nora Taylor, District Botanist
Scott Thomas, Archaeologist
Michael Weston, Fisheries Biologist